Returning to Our Roots: "Good Government" Evolves to "Good Governance"

In this issue of *Public Administration Review*, we present a symposium about good governance that takes us back to our roots, but also forward to our future. For most of the twentieth century, beginning with the Progressive movement, "good government" represented a meaningful aspiration for people who were dedicated to the betterment and effective operation of public institutions. The substance and rhetoric of the twentieth century is increasingly being replaced today by new conversations about "good governance."

What constitutes good governance? We generally subscribe to a simple principle: good governance is that which contributes to the good of society. Good governance, as a concept, has been used traditionally in the context of development and developing countries. It has been common for poorer countries to abide by "good governance principles" in order to get aid from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank (De Graaf 2013). Yet the idea of good governance is increasingly applied to modern nation states struggling to find new (multiactor and multilevel) approaches to public governance (Rhodes 2007). It is this shift that may explain the recent growth of scholarly interest in a wider application of the good governance concept. As the traditional institutions of government no longer define "what works" and "what is right," questions on the quality of governance automatically return to the center of public and academic attention. These questions touch upon the effectiveness and efficiency of governance, as well as elements of ethics (integrity), democracy, and legitimacy.

The concept of good governance is both *appealing* and *annoying*. It is appealing because it widens the scope of public performance evaluation. Whereas the New Public Management movement mainly focuses on questions of efficiency and output, good governance writers refer to a richer and more extensive landscape of relevant public values and performance parameters. Such broad ground, however, is also annoying: it is not easy to attend to a multitude of good governance criteria in practice. Moreover, many oft-mentioned "global" good governance values such as voice and transparency, rule of law, and government effectiveness (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2007) may be conflicting or contradictory in public policy and public management decisions. In recent years, the attention to good governance has also been criticized. Grindle (2010), for instance, has characterized good governance as an "inflated idea." Choudry writes (2002) tells us, "Good governance is a serious contender for a prize for the best example

of Orwellian doublespeak". Such dismissals leave us empty-handed, however, in our attempts to mitigate or cope with value tensions.

It is easier to agree on what constitutes bad governance than on what good governance is. Within the literature, there is an extensive debate about how good governance should be defined.

> Should it be about procedures only (like most definitions of representative democracy) or should it also contain substantial policies and outcomes? Should the concept be universally applicable worldwide (like the UN Declaration of Human Rights) or should it be relativized to different cultures? Should the concept be equated with administrative and economic efficiency or should it be understood as something that explains such efficiency? Should good governance include how well those who govern represent those who are governed, or should it be about the capacity to steer society? (Rothstein and Teorell 2012, 17)

Usually, organizations employing the good governance concept define it by constructing a wish-list consisting of rules, processes and behavior of governments (Bevir 2009; Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2005). As Kettl (1993) claimed, government's fundamental challenge in serving the public interest is to balance the pursuit of different – and inevitably contradictory – standards. Trade-offs between valued principles are thus the inevitable fate of any design process (LeGrand 2007). Ideas of effective operational structures, for instance, could be in breach of the law. Especially in volatile times characterized by budgetary restraints and dynamic stakeholder expectations, public decision makers face trade-offs between conflicting and contradictory public values and interests. Therefore, we believe a compelling way to think about "good governance" is as the ability to manage tensions between conflicting or contradictory public values. This is a primary theme of the symposium presented in this issue of *PAR*. Each contribution to the symposium addresses a different dimension of the management of tensions between public values in a specific way.

Milena Neshkova discusses tensions between economic efficiency and democratic legitimacy. She does so by exploring whether managers in agencies with greater budget autonomy are more or less, likely to involve the public when allocating resources. Her conclusion is that greater budget autonomy goes together with more responsibilities for public managers and greater willingness to secure public preferences.

Lieke Oldenhof, Jeroen Postma, and Kim Putters discuss the tensions between (often conflicting) public values from the perspective of compromise and justification. They conclude that good governance is a process full of conflicts and compromises that never leads to "final solutions."

In their contribution, Richard Cowell, James Downe, and Karen Morgan discuss the tension between widely accepted but abstract public values (e.g. integrity) and practice. They show how, in practice, the operationalization of abstract concepts of "the good" leads to conflicts. The conflict or disagreement is not about the public value itself, but about the concrete meaning of the value in everyday behavior.

Alan Lawton and Michael Macaulay go into the dynamic character of the relationship between democratic participation and public values, made operational as an ethical framework for integrity of local government in the UK. They conclude that direct participation has led to

improvements in accountability, trust and integrity in local authorities and has had a positive influence on civic skills, policy-making, and legitimacy.

Finally, Anne-Marie Reynaers investigates the impact of public-private partnerships (PPPs) on public values. She concludes that public values can be threatened, safeguarded or even strengthened in a public-private partnership. She emphasizes the importance of context in safeguarding public values and stresses the importance of the design of PPPs.

The contributions to the symposium show that managing tensions between values takes place in different ways. One way is *operationalization*. Even during the phase of translating commonly accepted "hooray" concepts (concepts no one can be against; just consider the alternative) into guiding principles for everyday life, tensions arise. For instance, we all agree on the importance of integrity (in general, no one will dispute its importance and no public official will go on record as being against it), but many of us disagree about what integrity means in daily practice. Good governance is also the process of creating a common normative orientation for daily action. Good governance does not stop with basic agreement on abstract hooray concepts, it also encompasses a continuous process of sense making of values.

A second avenue for managing tensions is *dealing and coping*. This takes place in a number of ways: by attributing responsibility elsewhere in a hierarchy, by negotiating, and by avoiding conflicts altogether. Thus, good governance may lead to divergent coping strategies with respect to different (conflicting) values. Which strategy is optimal depends on the context and the support of those who are affected by the specific strategy.

The third way concerns *the organizing*. In a situation in which a manager has plenty of room for maneuver they will probably make other choices in their good governance balancing act than they would in a situation where rules, interdependencies, and power relations restrain the possibilities for action. This leads to the question: is good governance – defined as managing tensions between public values – possible if managers are severely limited in their options for action? What are the minimum degrees of freedom required to hold an official accountable for good - or bad - governance?

Discussions around the globe about good governance will continue even as we debate unresolved conceptual puzzles. We hope this symposium begins to inform public professionals about theoretical and practical issues associated with good governance and highlights the topic's importance to evolving professional practice. We look forward to *PAR* serving as an outlet for contributions to the debate about good governance as we rediscover the roots of public administration.

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